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ABSTRACT

Teach for America is a national teacher corps of outstanding individuals who commit 2 years to teach in urban and rural areas experiencing persistent teacher shortages. Teach for America selects corps members through an intensive application process, prepares them to enter the classroom in a preservice institute, clusters them in placement sites, and establishes local offices in these areas to arrange for ongoing support and professional development. This handbook discusses all phases of the program in eight chapters: (1) Background and Goals; (2) What It Means To Be a Corps Member; (3) Program and Ongoing Responsibilities (includes recruitment and selection, acceptance, National Teachers Exam, preservice institute, induction, placement, support, ongoing professional development, and a description of the second summer); (4) Summary of Corps Member Requirements; (5) General Policies of Nondiscrimination, a code of conduct, placement and location, deferral, legal authorization to work, minimum undergraduate grade point average, falsification, misrepresentation, and criminal records and proceedings; (6) How to Make it to the First Paycheck (before graduation, during the institute, and the transition to placement); (7) Student Loan Deferment and Cancellation; and (8) Insurance. (LL)

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TEACH FOR AMERICA

Corps Member Handbook

1991-92

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Contents

1 **Background and Goals**

2 **What It Means To Be A Corps Member**

3 **Program & Ongoing Responsibilities**
3 Recruitment and Selection
3 Acceptance
3 National Teachers Exam
4 Pre-Service Institute
5 Induction
5 Placement
6 Support
6 Ongoing Professional Development
7 Second Summer

7 **Summary of Corps Member Requirements**

8 **General Policies**
8 Non-Discrimination
8 Code of Conduct
8 Placement Location
8 Deferral
8 Legal Authorization To Work
9 Minimum Undergraduate Grade Point Average
9 Falsification/Misrepresentation
9 Criminal Records and Proceedings

9 **How To Make It to the First Paycheck**
9 Before Graduation
10 During the Institute
10 Transition to Placement

11 **Student Loan Deferment & Cancellation**

12 **Insurance**

Teach For America is a national teacher corps of outstanding individuals who commit two years to teach in urban and rural areas that have persistent teacher shortages. Teach For America selects "corps members" through an intensive application process, prepares them in a pre-service training institute, clusters them in placement sites, and establishes local offices in those areas to arrange for their ongoing support and professional development.

Background and Goals

Teach For America's premise is that the future of the educational system depends in large part on two factors: 1) the creativity and intellect, and drive of the individuals who staff the schools; and 2) the extent to which the nation's leaders have experience in and a commitment to the nation's schools. Teach For America does not have the solutions to the many problems in our educational system. Our goal is to attract individuals who will commit to learning the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and who will help develop and implement new approaches.

Teach For America began in the spring of 1989 as the thesis of a Princeton University senior, and a team of recent graduates has taken it from concept to reality. Our 500 charter corps members were selected in 1990 from 2,500 applicants and are now teaching in New York City, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, rural Georgia, and rural North Carolina.

Teach For America's aim is to become a permanent institution that each year recruits, trains, places, and supports up to 3,000 individuals to teach in communities across the country.

Our immediate goals are:

- To provide children with a new source of energetic, committed, creative teachers who have strong academic backgrounds and who can serve as positive role models;
- To mitigate teacher shortages that persist in certain geographic areas even in times of general teacher surplus; and
- To train, place, and support corps members in such a way that their two years of teaching will have a positive impact on the children they teach and on their own commitment to America's educational system.

Our long-range objective is to play a significant role in the national effort to professionalize teaching and to improve schools. We hope to do this in the following ways:

- Elevate the image of teaching, by showing the public that thousands of outstanding individuals compete to enter the profession and find it a challenging occupation;
- Work with districts, local corporations, local universities, unions, community organizations, states, and the media in each community where we place corps members to bring about systemic changes that can positively impact all first-year teachers, all teachers, and all students;
- Contribute to the fields of teacher selection, training, support, and certification; and
- Create a corps of individuals who will have the experience and commitment to be advocates for educational improvement.

What It Means To Be A Corps Member

Those who commit to Teach For America express a unique degree of commitment to the American educational system. Our expectation is that corps members will spend two years going above and beyond – always striving to acquire the knowledge and skills to become an expert teacher, always seeking to do the best possible job with their particular assignments. They will take this experience with them as they work in education or in other fields, and we hope they will become powerful and effective advocates for educational improvement.

Teach For America is dedicated to working with districts that often lack the resources or salary structures to attract the number of teachers they need. We are subject to the realities of these districts, and corps members are expected to cope professionally and effectively in difficult situations. This year, among other things, corps members experienced last-minute and mid-year budget cuts in North Carolina that caused some to relocate to other placement sites, a three-week teacher strike in New Orleans, poor or non-existent mentoring programs in several districts, and paychecks that were more than two months late in some districts in Los Angeles. Many find themselves without chalk, textbooks, or access to copy machines. These circumstances demand that teachers be extremely flexible, creative, and resourceful.

Corps members assume a dual responsibility – to the school district in which they work and to Teach For America. Individuals must meet the requirements of both to maintain status as a corps member.

There are certain advantages to this dual responsibility. The most significant is that corps members have an opportunity to learn and grow through active participation in two networks – that of other teachers and that of fellow corps members. Corps members learn an immense amount from the experienced teachers who are faculty in our Institute, support facilitators, mentor teachers, and colleagues. And, unlike most first-year teachers, corps members have a ready-made support network made up of each other.

Corps members are expected to participate actively in Teach For America activities throughout the two years. This means full participation in the summer Institute, in support groups and workshops during the teaching experience, and in the "second summer" activities. Corps members will be expected to offer Teach For America's staff constructive feedback on their experiences by filling out extensive evaluation forms at the beginning and end of the Institute and in December and April of each year. In addition, selected corps members will be expected to cooperate with third-party evaluators who are studying the effectiveness of Teach For America's recruitment, training, and support mechanisms.

Corps members will also have the opportunity to participate in the development of the Teach For America program by serving in any of the following roles:

- Adjunct faculty at Institutes which occur after they have had one or more years of teaching experience;
- Members of their Local Advisory Councils, which exist to provide input to local Teach For America offices; and
- Members of the National Advisory Council, which provides sustained input to the Teach For America national staff.

Program and Ongoing Responsibilities

Recruitment and Selection
We believe that individuals who possess certain characteristics are more likely than others to be effective teachers in urban and rural schools, and we therefore look for these characteristics through an extensive selection process including a written essay application, three written references, a sample teaching session, and two interviews. We look for those individuals who demonstrate:

- Flexibility
- Professionalism
- Leadership
- Engaging classroom style
- High level of commitment, as demonstrated through excellence in academics, extracurricular activities, or work experience
- Educational approach consisting of high expectations for all students and sensitivity to the diversity of student backgrounds and learning styles

Acceptance
Recruiters recommend candidates for acceptance, and recommended candidates whose preferences and qualifications meet district needs are then accepted. Letters of acceptance detail the location and position in which the applicant has been placed.

Placement in the originally assigned location is contingent on the availability of jobs in that area. While districts commit a certain number of placements to Teach For America, last-minute budget cuts or changes in their needs can prevent them from honoring these commitments. In such cases, Teach For America will work with displaced corps members and other districts to find alternative placements. Ninety-five percent of the 1990 corps assumed teaching positions in their originally assigned locations.

National Teachers Exam (NTE)
Teach For America requires that corps members take the Core Battery of the National Teachers Exam. The Core Battery, administered by the Educational Testing Service, is a six-hour exam that costs $70 and

includes three tests: General Knowledge, Communication Skills, and Professional Knowledge. Corps members are welcome to take the exam before the Institute, but we will have a special sitting for corps members during the Institute. This exam will require advance preparation, as it demands knowledge specific to the teaching profession. Teach For America will provide corps members with the NTE Study Guide during the spring.

Districts and states often require individuals to take the NTE before they enter the classroom. Even if the exam is not required for provisional certification in a certain district, it may be required for full certification. The NTE gives Teach For America greater flexibility in placing corps members, and it affords corps members flexibility in switching to other sites should their placements fall through. In addition, NTE scores will give corps members added credibility with school officials; they provide added job security and sometimes make available superior placement possibilities.

Pre-Service Institute

Teach For America operates on the premise that effective teachers are made through experience, reflection, and ongoing support and professional development. The pre-service Institute is not designed to make corps members into expert teachers, but rather to prepare them to enter classrooms in diverse urban/rural environments and to begin the journey towards becoming an effective teacher.

Six weeks of the Institute take place in a single location, and 1 to 2 weeks take place in the local placement sites. Corps members spend each morning for five weeks student teaching. Experienced teachers and teacher educators provide instruction in pedagogy and curriculum during afternoon classes designed to blend practical tools with meaningful, theoretical underpinnings. Workshops and speakers add insight on specific issues.

The Institute faculty is made up of practicing teachers and university-based teacher educators. Practicing teachers have anywhere from 3 to 30 years of experience in urban or rural schools and come mostly from Teach For America's placement sites. They act not only as Institute faculty, but as support facilitators throughout the year. University faculty represent a smaller portion of our training staff and are teacher-trainers who have proven themselves outstanding in their fields.

Each corps member works closely with a "cooperating teacher" (in whose class he or she receives student teaching experience) and with a "mentor teacher," one of the practicing teachers who works with 10 to 15 corps members. Mentor groups meet frequently to process and discuss the student teaching and pre-service experience.

Academic and professional requirements and expectations are made clear at the start of the Institute, and corps members who do not live up to them do not graduate. Corps members are periodically evaluated by their mentors, other faculty, and their cooperating teachers. They are expected to produce written work in the form of a portfolio and to demonstrate mastery of a body of knowledge which Teach For America

believes is necessary for effective beginning teaching. Both written work and performance in student teaching are strictly evaluated, and corps members who do not progress toward teaching competence will not be placed.

Induction

The 1 to 2 week Induction that follows the initial 6 weeks of the Institute will provide corps members the opportunity to become familiar with the communities, districts, and schools in which they will be working. This period may also include continued district processing and interviewing, and district-required pre-service training.

Most corps members will be relocating, and there will be some time, though it will be limited, to find housing, purchase cars when necessary, and move into new accomodations. We will assist corps members in finding housing, means of transportation, and so on.

Placement

Teach For America chooses placement sites that demonstrate:

Need

Teach For America aims to mitigate persistent teacher shortages, and districts must document that they have a shortage of qualified, certified individuals to fill teaching positions.

Support

Teach For America aims to place teachers in supportive environments so that their two-year experience will have a positive impact both on the children they teach and on their own commitment to the educational system. When possible, we choose districts that commit to provide mentor teachers for all Teach For America corps members. We also consider the districts' willingness to work with Teach For America to ensure a positive experience for corps members.

The placement process is different in each district. Teach For America's negotiations with districts generally begin a year in advance of the intended placements. Given that districts are not at that point aware of their exact needs, Teach For America asks that they project their needs based on past experience and projected retirement, enrollment growth, and budget allocations.

Teach For America recruits individuals to fill these projections. We maintain constant contact with the district and school officials throughout the spring as districts gain a clearer picture of their needs and as Teach For America ascertains the results of its recruitment drive.

It is each corps member's individual responsibility to make sure he or she fulfills district paperwork and testing requirements. Teach For America provides information about the documents, forms, and tests that are required (official transcripts, TB tests, etc.). We will also schedule necessary testing and processing for each corps member.

Most districts send personnel to the summer training Institute to begin processing the necessary paperwork and to evaluate their assigned corps members to ensure they are acceptable to the district. Once corps members complete the Institute, they generally interview with one or

more principals to determine placement positions.

While some corps members sign contracts as early as mid-summer, others may not sign them until immediately prior to, and in some rare cases just after, the beginning of the school year.

Support

Teach For America is a *corps*, and its members meet during the summer, share experiences, and draw on each other as resources. This collegiality continues throughout the year, as corps members often choose to live together and see each other frequently in support groups and at professional development activities.

Teach For America has local offices in each of its placement sites which work closely with district officials, unions, local universities, and local corporations and foundations that can sometimes add to the resources of teachers. These offices also aim to provide the corps with direct support through local support groups and workshops. Corps members are expected to attend these support activities and to take an active role in the support of their colleagues.

Support groups

Support groups provide first-year teachers with a responsive and flexible support system as well as a mechanism for both ongoing professional development and social interaction. They meet at least once a month and more often during the teachers' first months in the classroom.

In the larger metropolitan areas, groups range in size from approximately 10 to 15 corps members per group, and every attempt is made to assign people to groups which reflect their current grade level and subject area. In rural districts, assignments are often made according to geographic limitations.

Active classroom teachers with experience in group facilitation serve as facilitators for each support group. Generally, these individuals are Institute faculty members.

Workshops

Each regional Teach For America office sponsors at least one workshop per month during which local and national educational organizations, teacher unions, and universities give presentations designed to address specific classroom issues and to introduce corps members to available outside resources. Workshops usually take place on weekends or after school hours during the week.

Ongoing Professional Development

Teach For America corps members are teaching under existing state provisions that enable individuals to begin teaching without full certification. Because they are placed within the bounds of current certification guidelines, corps members must complete any coursework or in-service activities required to renew their one-year licenses for the second year.

Corps members are individually responsible for registering, paying for, and completing coursework to renew their teaching certificates for the

second year, which can mean a time commitment of more than 3 hours a week. Corps members may spend anywhere from $0 to $500 to renew their certificates, although this year's corps members generally spent no more than $300.

Many corps members also decide to pursue further study towards full certification, and Teach For America and participating school districts encourage them to do so. In most districts, it is possible to attain full certification within the two-year commitment. The cost and length of study varies by district and university.

Second Summer

Teach For America brings the corps together between the first and second years for 1 to 2 weeks dedicated to re-energizing corps members and to exposing them to new ideas in education. The week provides opportunities for structured reflection in which corps members, drawing from their own experiences, work with each other to determine what makes a good teacher and what they hope to accomplish in their second year of teaching. They have an opportunity to share ideas and lesson plans with one another. In addition, corps members from different regions have a chance to share their experiences with others and work towards an understanding of the differences and similarities among placement regions.

Summary of Corps Member Requirements

Official status as a corps member is contingent upon the following factors, all of which are explained above:

- Successful completion of a BA or BS degree – candidates must be able to prove on the first day of the Institute that they have received their Bachelor's degree;
- Successful completion of the National Teachers Exam Core Battery;
- Successful completion of district-required tests;
- Successful completion of the Institute, including the on-site Induction;
- Approval of district personnel and school principals, who meet and interview candidates prior to the beginning of the school year;
- Successful completion of routine district procedures such as application, fingerprint checks, and medical clearance;
- Completion of any coursework or in-service activities required to teach for a second year in the assigned district; and
- Participation in the Second Summer and at mandated district or Teach For America functions throughout the year.

General Policies

Non-Discrimination
Teach For America does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age, marital status, pregnancy, or parenthood.

Code of Conduct
Teach For America reserves the right to dismiss a corps member if his or her behavior casts serious doubt on that individual's ability to have a positive impact on children in the classroom. Teach For America corps members must show respect for different views, cultures, attitudes, and for children from every circumstance and skill level.

Placement Location
Teach For America requires corps members to remain faithful to their commitment to teach for two years in the districts in which they are placed, or subsequently assigned. Once an individual matriculates, he or she may not request an alternative placement location. Corps members attempting to arrange placement with schools or school districts on an individual basis will be released from Teach For America, as this action strains our relationships with school districts and is unfair to other corps members.

Deferral
Teach For America rarely allows candidates to defer their acceptance. Deferrals that are granted are for periods of one year only. Candidates granted a deferral will be considered recommended for acceptance for the following year, but official acceptance depends on Teach For America locating a teaching position that matches the candidate's qualifications and preferences. As the needs of school districts change from year to year, locating a suitable position can sometimes be difficult. Therefore, a deferral does not guarantee acceptance into the program for the following year.

Persons requesting a deferral must submit a written statement to the Director of Recruitment and Selection explaining the reason for the deferral request and provide whatever documentation is necessary to support and verify the reason for the request.

All requests for deferral must be received by June 1, 1991, or by the matriculation response date indicated in the letter of acceptance, whichever comes later.

Legal Authorization To Work
Teach For America can place foreign nationals only if they have permanent resident status ("green card" status) from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services. Those applicants who have

student visas or temporary work permits valid for less that 2 years are not eligible for Teach for America positions. All other types of permits are considered on a case by case basis.

Minimum Undergraduate Grade Point Average
Teach For America cannot place individuals whose cumulative final undergraduate grade point average is below 2.0, and it is rare that we can place candidates whose final average is between 2.0 and 2.5. These restrictions are mandated by the school districts with which Teach For America works.

Candidates who had a grade point average of above 2.5 at the time of application, and whose final average falls below 2.5, are not guaranteed a placement and should report their final average grade point average to the Director of Recruitment & Selection prior to the first day of the Institute.

Falsification/Misrepresentation
Lying or misrepresentation of any sort on the application form or supporting application materials is grounds for dismissal.

Criminal Records and Proceedings
Teach For America reserves the right to deny admission to any applicant who has been convicted of a felony or is presently involved in a criminal proceeding. Teach For America is not responsible for finding alternative placements for applicants who cannot be hired by their assigned school districts because of their criminal records or present involvement in criminal proceedings. In addition, to the extent that Teach For America becomes aware of an applicant's conviction record or involvement in an ongoing criminal proceeding, Teach For America will inform the school district in which the applicant is planning to teach.

How To Make It to the First Paycheck

The financial transition between college and the working world, or between jobs, is always a difficult one. Teach For America is committed to making it possible for any individual to participate in the program regardless of his or her financial situation. Corps members should understand, however, that they are individually responsible for evaluating their financial situations and for planning how they will make it to their first paycheck. Paychecks may not come until a month or more into the school year, which can be as late as mid-October, soit is necessary to plan carefully. Please note that corps members do not have time to work during the Institute.

Before Graduation
Corps members are encouraged to save as much as possible and to apply for a credit card *before graduation*, when their student status makes it easier to get one.

During the Institute

Teach For America covers costs to transport corps members to the Institute by bus and then fly them to their placement sites. We also cover room, board, and all academic expenses during the Institute. Corps members are responsible for the National Teacher's Exam fee, any processing and testing fees required by the district, and any personal expenses incurred during the summer.

Generally, corps members are able to apply in May for a bank loan to which they have access at the beginning of the Institute. Teach For America negotiates these loans with banks in each placement site. They are at market interest rates, and in most cases corps members must pay them back over a 2 to 3 year period beginning with the receipt of their first paycheck.

Because banks in some placement sites do not provide access to funds at the beginning of the Institute, and because some corps members do not qualify for loans, corps members who envision needing additional funds during the Institute should apply for a Teach For America Institute Stipend at the time of matriculation. Stipends are awarded to individuals who demonstrate extreme need, and corps members receive their stipends at the beginning of the summer. Stipends are sufficient to pay required testing and processing fees and minimal personal expenses. Receipt of Stipends is contingent upon loan application denial. If a bank in the corps members' placement site provides loans at the beginning of the Institute, previously awarded Stipends are forfeited.

Transition to Placement

Corps members are responsible for their own expenses (moving expenses, rent, security deposit, car down payment, insurance, etc.).

Teach For America covers transportation from the Institute to Induction, as well as food and housing during Induction. Generally, corps members sign contracts with their districts during this period. Once a corps member signs a contract with his or her school district, he or she is able to apply for loans through special programs designed by Teach For America with banks or credit unions. These loans are generally available within 48 hours. Usually, corps members may borrow as much as they wish at market rates and are expected to pay them back within 2 to 3 years.

In cases where corps members are not able to sign contracts during Induction, Teach For America will continue to arrange for food and housing until they do sign a contract, after which time it is expected that corps members will begin begin supporting themselves. Corps members should understand this may mean sleeping on floors and cooking meals together.

Because some corps members will not be eligible for loans, those envisioning the need for financial aid during the transition to placement should apply for a Teach For America Transitional Grant at the time of matriculation. Grants are awarded to individuals who demonstrate extreme need, and these

grants are sufficient to enable corps members who are not eligible for loans to cover food, housing, transportation, and minimal transitional costs until they receive their first paycheck. Receipt of Grants is contingent upon loan application denial.

Student Loan Deferment & Cancellation

Borrowers of most federal government loans are entitled to a 6-month grace period following college graduation during which no payments are due and the amount of debt will not increase. First-year teachers working in Teach For America placement sites earn competitive salaries and many individuals will be able to begin paying back their loans once they begin teaching.

Teach For America can, however, place individuals in designated areas which enable them to defer or cancel their federal student loans under existing federal statutes. Teach For America will do its best to place those who desire loan deferment in areas that meet federal guidelines for deferment or cancellation, and corps members must take the initiative to follow deferment procedures. These deferrals and cancellations will start when corps members begin teaching in the fall of 1991.

Borrowers of Perkins/National Direct Student Loans (NDSL) who are placed in schools designated "low income" by the federal government will receive a deferral during which time they are not required to pay back principal or interest. These borrowers also qualify for the following levels of loan cancellation, provided they teach in a designated school: 15% off the principal amount during each of the first two years; 20% during the next two; and 30% during the fifth year. Corps members wishing to apply for deferral and cancellation must obtain a "Request for Deferment of Repayment" form from their lenders. For more information, call Federal Student Financial Aid Information at 800-333-4636.

Borrowers of Stafford/Guaranteed Student Loans (GSL) who are placed in designated "teacher shortage" areas are entitled to a deferment of principal payments and interest, and borrowers of SLS Loans are entitled to a deferral of principal (not interest) payments, *if* they had no outstanding balance on a GSL, PLUS, SLS, or Consolidated Program loan taken out before July 1, 1987. GSL and SLS loans taken out before July 1, 1987 *are not* entitled to any deferral or cancellation. Corps members wishing to apply for these deferrals should request a deferral form from their lenders under the Targeted Teacher Deferment Act of 1986.

Insurance

Teach For America does not provide health or life insurance, although the school districts in which we place generally offer health benefits and insurance that begin 30 days after a teacher assumes his or her duties. Individuals who graduate in 1991 *may* have coverage through their colleges and universities that extends into the summer. Teach For America will provide information regarding short-term insurance for those who wish to purchase it.

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